

Wisconsin Public Health Forward

What is the Wisconsin Public Health Forward? The Wisconsin Public Health Forward is a joint effort between the Wisconsin Association of Local Health Departments and Boards (WALHDAB), the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute (UWPHI), and the Wisconsin Department of Health Services/Division of Public Health (WI DPH).

The aim of the Wisconsin Public Health Forward is to further the transformation of modernizing Wisconsin's governmental public health system, specifically local and tribal health departments by applying lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic to increase public health's capacity to respond to the current and future pandemics. The initial focus of the Wisconsin Public Health Forward is to address three system-wide infrastructure issues facing local and tribal health departments: funding, workforce, and legal authority.

The initiative is supported through a contract made possible by the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) COVID-19: ELC Enhancing Detection Expansion funding available through June of 2023. Wisconsin Public Health Forward funding partners recognized that while ARPA COVID-19 ELC funding is time-limited, transforming the governmental public health infrastructure is a long-term commitment, thereby establishing a three-year overarching outcome for the project.

What impacts will this initiative have for WI Health Departments? The 2025 overarching outcome for this initiative is *'all Wisconsin local and tribal health departments use foundational capabilities to support the health of their communities'* with the goal to improve health outcomes and close the gap in disparities between all populations in Wisconsin. Indicators to measure progress include:

Leading Indicator

- The percentage of local and tribal health departments that meet national Public Health Accreditation Standards (PHAB) by being accreditation ready or accredited.

Secondary Indicators

- The percentage of local and tribal health departments, reporting they have funding and staffing necessary to perform foundational capabilities.
- The percentage of local health departments that have a communicable disease ordinance they operate under that is aligned with state statute and administrative rules.

Why focus on Health Department Funding, Workforce, and Legal Authority? The COVID-19 pandemic magnified long-standing issues faced by our governmental public health system at all levels; local, state, national and tribal. In December of 2021, the Bipartisan Policy Center released ["Public Health Forward: Modernizing the U.S. Public Health System"](#) report. The report outlines recommended actions for public health departments and for state, territorial, and local policy makers in six core areas: financing, data and information technology, workforce, public health laws and governance, partnerships, and community engagement. The framework is designed for elected and public health officials to implement together; with actions centered on health equity, addressing the conditions necessary for all people to achieve their fullest potential for health and well-being.

The Wisconsin Association of Local Health Departments and Boards (WALHDAB) with the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute, and Wisconsin Department of Health Services/Division of Public Health have identified three areas to strengthen in the next three years. Specifically,

- Funding: Create sustainable funding for [core public health infrastructure](#) to support foundational capabilities and areas.
- Workforce: Support a capable, diverse, and inclusive public health workforce.
- Legal Authority: Clarify public health's ability to prevent and control communicable disease.

By addressing these three infrastructure areas, health departments will be in a stronger position to further partnerships and community engagement to address the social, economic, and educational factors that influence health conditions in their communities, to achieve Wisconsin's vision "everyone living their best life".

How does this initiative support Public Health Accreditation (PHAB) and Foundation Public Health Services? Health Departments who are accreditation ready or accredited demonstrate their ability to meet national standards necessary to carry out quality governmental public health services. To meet public health standards, health departments must have sustainable funding; a capable, diverse and inclusive workforce; and legal authority and governance. Wisconsin Administrative Code Chapter [DHS 140 Required Services of Local Health Departments](#) was revised in June 2019 with the goal to align requirements for level 2 and 3 local health departments to the public health accreditation standards.

A well-designed and high-functioning governmental public health infrastructure is necessary to achieve desired population health outcomes. The Public Health National Center for Innovations (PHNCI) [Foundational Public Health Services](#) framework identified eight infrastructure foundational capabilities and five foundational areas to achieve population health outcomes. Funding, workforce, and legal authority is embedded within the PHNCI foundational capabilities.

How will this initiative benefit the health of communities across WI? A solid governmental public health infrastructure is critical for health departments with their community partners to undertake the socioeconomic, cultural and environmental conditions necessary for all people to achieve their fullest potential for health and well-being. By aligning statewide efforts to address public health funding, workforce, and legal authority, health departments will be in a better position to make improvements in health outcomes such as infant mortality, the prevalence of chronic diseases, mental wellness, environmental health hazards, and respond to future pandemics and natural disasters.

How will project goals be carried out? In March of 2022, statewide workgroups were launched made up of Health Officers; representatives from funding partners, UW-Population Health Institute and WI Department of Health Services/Division of Public Health; consultants with expertise in funding, workforce, and legal authority; supported by WALHDAB Badger Bay Management staff. Workgroups will be guided by established project charters that outline deliverables and objectives that lead to the 2025 overarching outcome and indicators. Input from stakeholders during this project will be sought to ensure products are meaningful to the end user.

The focus for the Wisconsin Public Health Forward is expected to expand in the coming years, addressing public health infrastructure supports beyond health departments to include partners who contribute to Wisconsin's public health system.